

2. TOWN HISTORY

Although the incorporation of Newton as a New Hampshire town came about in 1749, the populating of the territory we now know as Newton took place over one hundred years earlier. In 1639, a grant was given by England to a group of people to form New-Salisbury (Amesbury) . The borders of the new township were at first somewhat indefinite, but they were subsequently defined to include present day South Hampton, New Hampshire and portions of Kingston, Plaistow , Newton, Seabrook, Hampstead, New Hampshire as well as the territory of Amesbury and Merrimac, Massachusetts.

The region west of the Powwow River was wild country and formed the frontier for the new township. As with other frontiers throughout the history of the United States, the wilderness around the western bank of the Powwow was home to Native Americans . The Naumkeaks were the best known of the Native peoples in this area, and relations between the Naumkeaks and the new settlers were generally peaceable. Relations, however, were limited to commercial transactions, where goods were traded between the settlers and the Naumkeaks .

The greatest immediate danger to all who lived in the area came from hostile war parties of Mic Macs from present day Maine and New Brunswick , Canada. These war parties roamed to parts west and south as far as present day Connecticut, capturing goods, food and a measure of control of the area. Large numbers of local populations were killed during these campaigns. The frequency of the Mic Mac raids, however , were greatly diminished by recurring epidemics of disease, many of which had arrived with the settlers of the New World. Between 1616 and the time the first new settlers trickled on to the west shores of the Powwow River in the early 1640's, 90% of the Native American population of the area was wiped out.

This section of the Amesbury grant remained a sparsely settled wilderness until the years following 1700. About that time, families began to settle on the western shore of the Powwow in a community separate from the original settlement . A meetinghouse was erected, and people drifted away from their original township of Amesbury.

About 1720, Joseph Bartlett, who was destined to become one of Newton's first citizen's, took up residence in the Amesbury-Newtown area following twelve years of trading and living with the Naumkeaks. It was not long before neighbors settled around him. Concentrated efforts were undertaken to form a township of Newtown, since the establishment of the Massachusetts and New Hampshire boundary line placed this section in the territory of the Province of New Hampshire.

That such a movement was afoot sometime before 1741 is shown by a petition submitted by South Hampton residents to Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire. The petition requested that the signers be polled out to parishes other than the earlier proposed town . In this petition of 1741, it was stated that there were approximately sixty families desirous of forming a new town . This leads us to believe that the population of the new town was around sixty families when it was formed. Since the United States census did not begin until 1790, we have no definite count to refer to between 1711 and 1790.

At a legal meeting of the people of South Hampton, held on July 6, 1748, consideration was given to a matter, which concerned Newtown. There were a number of people residing at the western end of South Hampton who felt that it would be to their advantage to be incorporated within the bounds of Newtown. It was therefore agreed at this meeting that these persons should be allowed to poll themselves out to another parish providing they filed a list of their names with Governor Wentworth within thirty days of the meeting. These individuals were to give up all voting privileges in the town of South Hampton except where the mending or repair of highways was concerned, and to transfer their votes to Newtown.

The aforementioned petition rested in the hands of the New Hampshire Council for a number of years before any action was definitely taken. It was not until December 6, 1749, that Newtown was officially incorporated and entitled to the rights and privileges of a New Hampshire town. On this date, Governor Benning Wentworth gave the Newtown Charter to the anxious settlers of this area. This document set forth the bounds and limitations of the town. This addition to the grant of Newtown was entered and recorded on the original charter on December 15, 1749.

On January 1, 1771, the selectmen of Newtown sent a petition to Governor John Wentworth for a new boundary line between Newtown and South Hampton. South Hampton had previously asked that a line be drawn up, but the selectmen felt that they did not wish such a line to be drawn unless they could be strengthened by it. The people of Newtown felt that they should have a number of families who resided between Poe River and their meeting house. These families were nearer the Newtown meeting house than to that of South Hampton. The selectmen requested in this petition that the decision should rest with an 'unbiased Committee of the Court, which they felt sure would be of the same mind as the people of Newtown. Just a year later, on January 4, 1772, the boundary line between Newtown and South Hampton was fixed to the satisfaction of all concerned. Meetings with South Hampton, as well as with Plaistow and Kingston, were held every seven years following a state act passed in July 1791, which required towns to renew their bounds and marks every seven years.

With the coming of the conflict between America and Great Britain in 1774, we find that Newtown was far from backward in sending her men to fight for freedom. Three men fought at Bunker Hill. In September 1775, the people of Newtown voted to send as many men as would go to Portsmouth to help in the work on the Batteries. Just seven days after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the town voted to send nine men to Crown Point to reinforce General John Sullivan. In all, Newtown placed 31 men on the New Hampshire rolls and nine men on the Massachusetts rolls in this, her first war as a New Hampshire town.

The boundary lines of Newtown were not left undisturbed; In 1845, on the 2nd of July, the last bit of annexation took place. On that date, a portion of East Kingston was added to Newtown. A year later, July 10, 1846, the name Newtown was changed to the Newton that we know today. So, throughout the years, from 1749 until the present, Newton has been far from dormant. As a town it has grown from infancy and has taken a creditable part in state and national affairs as can be seen by Newton's military rolls and prominent men.